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Speaking Points

The Honourable Tony Clement, PC, MP
Minister of Industry

Announcement of Canada's New Astronauts

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Check Against Delivery

Thank you, Steve, for your kind introduction.

And thank you, everyone, for joining us here today at the Canada Science and Technology Museum for this important announcement.

This is a very exciting day for all of us — but it is especially exciting for two remarkable Canadians who are about to join the ranks of a very elite group.

This group is composed of many historic names: Marc Garneau, Roberta Bondar, Bjarni Tryggvason, Chris Hadfield, Dave Williams and Steve MacLean — our current President of the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

When the call went out that Canada was recruiting two new astronauts, the response was massive. As Steve has told us, more than 5300 highly qualified men and women applied for two jobs that are literally out of this world.

There is an enormous talent pool out there of Canadians who dream of space exploration and development. We are fortunate to have so many knowledgeable and talented candidates to choose from.

For nearly half a century, Canada has been a leader in space exploration and development. Our achievements are remarkable and something we can all be truly proud of. We remain among a very small group of nations that leads the world in these areas.

The length of time we have been at the forefront of space exploration and development is impressive. We tend to look at our **future** in space. Many think of space as the old *Star Trek* TV show described it — the **final** frontier.

If I look back for a moment, this year marks the 40th anniversary of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon. And over the decades since Canada launched its first satellite, we have developed a great legacy in space. We were the third spacefaring nation. We're known around the world as pioneers in many space applications and technologies. We are known for our expertise in earth observation, communications satellites and robotics. We're known for the quality of our space science, and we have developed an impeccable reputation.

Our strong reputation for space robotics was built on the technological excellence of Canadarm, Canadarm 2 and Dextre. I actually got to operate the Canadarm when I visited CSA headquarters, and Steve told me I was a natural. Maybe there is a career for me after politics.

In Canada's Economic Action Plan, we made a key commitment to the future of space robotics with our $110-million investment to develop land rovers. These are vehicles that can be used to explore the Moon and Mars, but they will also be widely used here on Earth.

Canada's investments in space science are investments in Canada's technological advancement. These advances help us defend Canada's borders and interests, as well as help support resource management and environmental monitoring. These investments also drive innovation here on the ground. Robotics technology initially designed for space is reapplied to new fields like telesurgery, neurosurgery and Canada's mining industry.

But there is another area of expertise that has put us up there with the great modern-day spacefaring nations: our ability to recruit, train and provide exciting missions for astronauts. This expertise **inspires** new generations of scientists, technologists and mathematicians — the kinds of people who help us push further into space.

Canada has a very successful astronaut program. We have sent astronauts to space 13 times — with 5 of those to the International Space Station.

We're going to add to that legacy of achievement in the coming weeks. On May 27, Bob Thirsk will take off on a mission where he will spend six months on the Space Station. For his sake, I hope the food is good up there!

A few weeks after that on June 13, Julie Payette will join Bob on the Space Station. It will be the first time that Canadian astronauts will meet in space. Julie will be operating the robotics systems on the Space Station, including Canadarm 2. I'm sure she's even better at operating it than I am!

I am sure if you asked Julie or Bob when they were children what they wanted to do when they grew up, they may well have answered, "I want to be an astronaut."

This is a dream of many young Canadians. In fact, it is a dream that is coming true today for two outstanding individuals.

These two individuals inspire our young people to reach for the stars. They will be role models to encourage children to pay attention to their lessons in mathematics, the sciences, medicine and engineering.

They have excellent credentials. They have been put to the test in a very rigorous selection process. They are about to undergo training that will further test their limits.

And they will prove to themselves and to all of us how it is indeed possible to go far beyond the limits of what you **thought** you could do.

In the years ahead, these two exceptional individuals will have great adventures and contribute to the advancement of technology and knowledge. They will become modern-day adventurers and explorers.

And I would now like to present Canada's two new heroes — the newest members of our proud astronaut team: Jeremy Hansen and David Saint-Jacques.

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